UNITED
NATIONS

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Economic and Social
Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.4/1997/NGO/112
14 April 1997

Original: ENGLISH

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Fifty-third session
Agenda item 21

RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Written statement submitted by the International Falcon Movement, a non-governmental organization on the Roster

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[14 April 1997]

Situation of children in the Islamic Republic of Iran

1. The General Assembly, by its resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989, adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Assembly expressed the hope that the Convention would enter into force as soon as possible. With the number of signatories having reached the necessary number, the Convention came into effect one year after its approval. The number of countries, which have signed this treaty so far has reached 186.

2. The approval and entry into force of this Convention without doubt is one of the great achievements of the international community for the promotion of children's rights. Despite this measure, after seven years, the conditions of children in many of the State parties are far from meeting the recognized standards. Children are still the main victims of poverty, economic exploitation, prostitution, sexual exploitation, military conflicts and many more international disasters. Therefore it is important that the efforts of

each State party to implement the Convention to defend children in its country, and in the rest of the world, should be examined seriously. The Committee on the Rights of the Child could publish a balance sheet based on the initial report of each State party to show the current obstacles in the implementation of the Convention.

3. Since the fifty-third session of the Commission on Human Rights is considering the situation of children in the context of item 21, the International Falcon Movement, as a non-governmental organization for the defence of children's rights, recognizes the necessity of bringing the situation of children in the Islamic Republic of Iran, as a State party, to the attention of the Commission.

4. Historically, the case of the Iranian regime is a sad reminder of the wave of children used for clearing the minefields during the eight-year war with Iraq. Khomeini, the leader of the regime, promised paradise to these children after their death. During those years, thousands of Iranian children became the victims of this policy and one of the longest military conflicts in the Middle East. Part of this loss has been confirmed by officials and reflected in the official media. Kayhan newspaper, in its issue of 20 July 1987, quoted the Education Ministry as saying that in 1986 alone, 120,000 students had been dispatched to the war fronts. The newspaper added that during the year more than 2,000,000 spare parts for mortars had been made by children. Creation of a post known as "Deputy of War Affairs in the Education Ministry", shows precisely how the Islamic Republic systematically used the children in a military conflict. Another newspaper called Islamic Republic in its 29 September 1988 issue quoted the same official as saying that during the eight-year war, 90 per cent of the strike forces on the fronts were made up of schoolchildren. Regarding the mortality rate of children during these years, Abrar newspaper on 4 July 1995 quoted the Governor of Maazandaran province as saying that among those students sent to the fronts from the province, 16,000 were killed and 45,000 injured. Of course, we have to notice that Iranian officials have always refrained from giving an accurate number of the losses in this fatal war. It must also be mentioned that Iranian officials have always refrained from publishing the real figures of the war casualties and have tried to minimize them.

5. If this disastrous policy belonged only to the past and there was no serious sign of its continuation in the Islamic Republic of Iran, perhaps the subject could then be consigned to the history books. But the reality is that the training and use of children in a paramilitary organization called "Bassij", with the aim of their participation in military conflicts, is part of the permanent policy of the regime. State-run media continuously give news and information in this regard. Etellat newspaper, in its issue dated 3 August 1995, said that "The third gathering of Bassiji's students finished its work yesterday and quoted Brigadier Afshar, commander of the "Bassij Resistance Force", as saying that "so far 1,750,000 Bassiji students in 16,200 secondary and high schools have been organized in the form of combat groups". Salam newspaper in its 24 September 1995 issue said that 1,631,862 Iranian pupils were members of pupils' Bassij. This kind of policy is in conflict with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international human rights conventions.

6. Commission resolution 1995/83, which was adopted without a vote, recognized the right to conscientious objection to military service for every citizen. Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights also recognize this right. Obviously, exercising this right, that is to decide whether to decide to kill and participate in training with this aim, requires a certain level of development. Iranian children, who are being trained in the form of combat groups, are unable to exercise this right. The international community must ask the Iranian regime to stop this violation of children's rights.

7. Sexual exploitation of little girls was officially legitimized by the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Article 1041 of the Civil Law, puts the age at which girls can marry, marriage before this age is possible with the permission of her "guardian". According to article 1210 of this law, the age of puberty for girls is nine lunar years (equivalent eight years and nine months). This kind of legislation and the acceptance of polygamy in the Iranian laws, only pave the way for the sexual exploitation of little children. This too is in conflict with the spirit of the Convention.

8. By resolution 1993/79, the Commission approved the Programme of Action for the Elimination of the Exploitation of Child Labour and asked the States Members of the United Nations, as a priority, to take the necessary legislative and administrative measures to implement the Programme of Action nationally and internationally and to report to the Sub-Commission thereon. The Sub-Commission in its resolution 1995/16, requested the Secretary-General to invite Member States to report on the measures taken in this regard.

9. The International Falcon Movement is concerned to know about the measures taken by the Islamic Republic of Iran. The reality is that child labour in Iran, especially with the social poverty that the country is facing, is a growing phenomenon. Hamshahri newspaper wrote on 6 January 1996: "although those under 15 years should not be forced to work, more than 266,000 youngsters are working in different fields."

10. If the prevailing general atmosphere of suppression and human rights violations are added to the above-mentioned points, the horrific violation of children's rights can be better understood. One example was the report of the Washington Post on 22 November 1996: "Some of the 6 to 11-year-old girls had been put in jail accused by the regime of 'corruption' or living in the streets. Some of them had been abandoned in the streets by their families. When the officials of the regime were questioned about their situation they were not able to find any files whereas, according to Iranian law, a girl who is 9 can be put on trial like a mature person and can be punished accordingly."

11. It is necessary that the United Nations bodies give priority to the prevailing situation in Iran.